

THE PROCEEDINGS

of

**The South Carolina
Historical Association**

2006

Robert Figueira and Stephen Lowe
Co-Editors

The South Carolina Historical Association
South Carolina Department of Archives and History
Columbia, South Carolina
www.palmettohistory.org/scha/scha.htm

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The SOUTH CAROLINA HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION is an organization that furthers the teaching and understanding of history. The only requirement for membership is an interest in and a love for history. At the annual meeting papers on European, Asian, U.S., Southern, and South Carolina history are routinely presented. Papers presented at the annual meeting may be published in *The Proceedings*, a refereed journal.

Membership benefits include: a subscription to *The Proceedings of the South Carolina Historical Association*, notification of the annual meeting, the right to submit a proposal for a paper for presentation at the annual meeting, the quarterly *SCHA Newsletter*, and the annual membership roster of the Association.

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Co-Editors' Notes

The Proceedings of the South Carolina Historical Association is a refereed journal containing selected papers presented at the annual meeting. The co-editors and the other members of the Executive Board serve as the editorial committee that is assisted by external reviewers chosen for their expertise. The opinions expressed in this journal represent the views only of the individual contributors; they do not reflect the views of the co-editors, other members of the editorial committee, or the South Carolina Historical Association.

The co-editors wish to thank the authors whose papers are published here for their cooperation in revising their oral presentations and their written submissions. As has been the case often in the past, the assistance of Rodger Stroup and the South Carolina Department of Archives and History has been crucial in the production of this volume. Finally, very special thanks must be accorded to Judy Andrews for copy preparation and copyediting. Her speedy, careful, and judicious work in this capacity has again greatly enhanced this volume.

Constitution

- I. The name of the organization shall be the South Carolina Historical Association.
- II. The objects of this Association shall be to promote historical studies in the state of South Carolina, to bring about a closer relationship among persons living in this state who are interested in history, and to encourage the preservation of historical records.
- III. Membership shall be open to anyone interested in the objectives of the Association. Annual dues shall be determined by the Executive Committee. After having been a member of the Association for ten years and upon reaching the age of sixty-five, any member may be designated an emeritus member by the secretary. Emeritus members have all the rights and privileges of membership without being required to pay the annual dues. Student members shall pay annual dues at half-rates.
- IV. The officers shall be president, vice-president, secretary, and treasurer; these shall be elected at each annual meeting. The Executive Committee shall normally nominate one person for each office. The vice-president shall be the automatic nominee for president. Nomination from the floor may be made for any office. Officers shall have the duties and perform the functions customarily attached to their respective offices with such others as may from time to time be prescribed.
- V. The Executive Committee shall be composed of officers, the editor of *The Proceedings*, and three other members elected for a term of three years. The duties of the Executive Committee shall be to fix the date and place of the annual meeting, to attend to the publication of *The Proceedings*, to prepare a program for the annual meeting, to prepare a list of nominations for the officers of the Association as provided in Article IV, to supervise the expenditures of the Association's funds, and such other duties as may from time to time be assigned to them by the Association. There shall be such other committees as the president may appoint, or be instructed to appoint, by resolutions of the Association.
- VI. There shall be an annual meeting of the Association at the time and place appointed by the Executive Committee.

VII.A. The Association shall publish annually its proceedings to be known as *The Proceedings of the South Carolina Historical Association*. It shall contain the minutes of the annual meeting together with such papers and documents selected by the Executive Committee. Each fifth year, *The Proceedings* shall include a copy of the constitution of the Association. At least every five years, *The Proceedings* shall include a current list of the membership.

B. All papers read at the annual meeting shall become the property of the Association except as otherwise may be approved by the Executive Committee.

C. The Executive Committee shall annually elect an editor of *The Proceedings* who shall have authority to appoint an associate editor and shall be a member of the Executive Committee.

VIII. In the event of the dissolution, the remaining assets of the Association, if any, shall be donated by the Executive Committee to another organization which shares the objects and aims of the Association.

IX. The Publications Endowment Fund exists to supplement the income available for the publication of *The Proceedings*. Contributions may be made by anyone, and they will be acknowledged in writing. The Fund will be administered by three trustees: the president, the treasurer, and the editor of *The Proceedings*. The trustees shall invest the Fund so as to obtain a secure and steady income and report annually to the membership the status of the Fund. The trustees may designate annually a sum no greater than 80 percent of the earnings of the Fund to defray the cost of printing *The Proceedings* and add the surplus of earnings each year to the principal. Should the Executive Committee determine that the Fund is not longer necessary for the purpose for which it was established, they shall recommend that this Article be removed from the constitution. If the Fund is liquidated, the Executive Committee shall make an unrestricted gift of the principal to the endowment fund of the University South Caroliniana Society or similar historical repository in South Carolina and transfer the balance of the earning to the treasury of the Association.

X. The constitution may be amended by a two-thirds vote of the members present at the annual meeting.

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Shared Traditions: South Carolina as a Folk Culture

Charles Joyner

IN THE FLICKERING LIGHT OF A SLAVE-CABIN FIREPLACE in All Saints Parish, just north of Georgetown on the Waccamaw River, little Sabe Rutledge listened in wide-eyed wonder to the endlessly fascinating folktales of Buh Rabbit. "How come I know all these Buh Rabbit story, Mudder spin, you know," he would recall. "Mudder and Father tell you story to keep you eye open." He and the other slave children delighted in Buh Rabbit's struggle for mastery with his more powerful but less intelligent adversary Buh Bear. These stories taught the children that the powerless must learn the ways of the powerful and that one must learn how to avoid a trick as well as how to perpetrate one. They taught that existing power relations were not necessarily natural power relations. Portraying the weak defeating the strong by using their wits, these tales promoted the idea of freedom within the House of Bondage. The symbolic struggle fostered a sense of identification with Buh Rabbit, who seemed so much like Sabe's father, Rodrick, while Buh Bear seemed so much like Ole Mossa. The children learned that ethics appropriate in some situations might not be helpful in others. The obligations of friendship were expected within the slave community, but when dealing with the master one had much to gain and little to lose by adopting the ethics of the trickster. These narratives redefined the harsh realities of life in bondage into a realm more attractive. They made a virtue of necessity and gave a voluntary color to an involuntary plight.

About ninety miles upcountry from Georgetown, at Plane Hill near the village of Stateburg in the high hills of Santee, little Mary Miller learned from her grandmother to sing the old Scottish folk ballads "Lord Lovel" and "Barbara Allen." In "Lord Lovel" a rich young aristocrat rides off on his steed, "strange countries for to see." He returns in a year and a day, only to find that his neglected sweetheart has died. He has lost his most cherished desire while away engaging in quixotic adventures. In "Barbara Allen" a young woman is summoned to the sickbed of her sweetheart, who had earlier slighted her by toasting another woman at a local tavern. He tries to arouse her pity ("Yes, I'm surely dying"), but his stratagem fails and she rejects his explanation of the tavern incident. In both ballads, as in so many others, the actions of the hero appear doomed. The hero and heroine are united only in the grave. These ballads take place in a strongly patriarchal world, one that both reflected and gave shape to the real world in which little Mary lived. Although the father-figure appears but briefly as a faceless symbol of power in "Barbara Allen," he makes his presence strongly felt ("Oh father, oh father, come dig my grave, come dig

it long and narrow"). Sung without the intrusion of sentiment, sentimentality, or didacticism, the stark actions of the ballads approach tragic stature. To recognize the impersonality of Mary Miller's ballads is not to deny their drama. It is only to point out that singing of such misfortunes, unrelieved by comment, promoted a sense of ironic detachment - perhaps the ultimate taking for granted.

Years later, as the grown-up Mary Boykin Chesnut, she sat at the deathbed of the Old South, victim of its own quixotic adventures. Vividly recording its final agonies in her famous "diaries," she was as aloof and coldhearted as Barbara Allen. From the heedlessness of the Lord Lovels and the helplessness of the Sweet Williams (as well as the tyranny of the arbitrary patriarchs) she encountered in ballads, she developed a detached skepticism toward the male dominance and female subordination of the patriarchal society in which she was bred. From the stark but understated lost causes of the ballads, she absorbed an awareness that human life is filled with little ironies and that large disasters from time to time shape the course of historical events.

It would appear, then, that oral traditions served as sources of visions and values not merely in the slave cabins of Rodrick Rutledge and his family, but in the Big House of United States Senator Stephen Decatur Miller and his family as well. Just as Sabe Rutledge's ancestors brought African folk traditions with them and reshaped those traditions on Southern slave plantations into an African American folk culture marked by strong African continuities, so Mary Boykin Chesnut's ancestors brought with them British and Celtic folk traditions that helped to shape her worldview and ethical dynamics in significant ways.

* * * *

What is this folk culture, and why should we regard it as important? I think the best definition is that folk culture is what we remember - not because it is reinforced by the church, the state, the school, or the press, but for no other reason than that it is unforgettable. Our popular culture, while widely known in the short run, is essentially disposable. A popular song rarely lasts more than six weeks on the charts. After that it is a "moldy oldie." Popular culture is created for the moment, but folk culture - like great art - endures for the ages. But unlike the creations of conscious artists, unlike the creations of, say, a William Gilmore Simms or a Julia Peterkin, a Washington Allston or a Jonathan Green (whose creations embody their individual visions and values), folk culture embodies in its traditional chain of transmission the visions and values of the folk themselves.

It would be difficult to overemphasize the importance of tradition in folk culture. Imagine that you make up a story, or a song - both the words and the music -

but nobody knows it is your story or your song. It is presumed to belong to everyone. Anyone who wishes can change it in any way, for any reason. If they cannot understand part of it, find some part of it offensive, think they can improve on some part, or simply forget a part, they are free to change your song to their hearts' content for the next decade, the next generation, the next century. It is unlikely that all of your story or song will survive the process of weeding out everything unintelligible, inartistic, offensive, or simply forgettable. But what does survive will be what you share with everyone who became a link in the traditional chain of transmission. Some of the folktales and folksongs still alive in Carolina tradition are centuries old. Now, we neither remember nor forget without reason. So what remains, after we forget everything that is not truly memorable, is something primal, something very close to the basic poetic impulse of the human species.

An old Southern proverb says "You can't tell the depth of a well by the length of the pumphandle." Applied to the study of folk culture, it suggests that, like the shadows cast on the wall of Plato's cave, the most visible things about South Carolina are only the visible reflections of unseen beliefs and attitudes. The most characteristic expressions of our folk culture - the rich humor of our tales, the haunting cadences of our ballads and songs, the beauty of our hand-made baskets and pottery - are significant in themselves. But they also reflect the visions and values by which our people have lived, thus providing an insight into the very essence of South Carolina.

* * * *

We began as many. Colonial South Carolina was made up of various peoples. We were Spanish. The first nation to bring European folk culture to the New World was Spain, beginning in the sixteenth century. Planting colonies in what is now South Carolina at San Miguel de Gualdape and at Santa Elena, the Spanish left a strong Hispanic cultural imprint on these shores. And we were French. Following the Spanish, French settlers implanted elements of Gallic folk culture in South Carolina.

We were English. By the end of the seventeenth century the English had settled at Charles Town, bringing with them their storehouse of British folklore. More than any English mainland colony, our roots were Caribbean. Many of us were English by way of the West Indies, especially by way of Barbados. Barbadians such as the Middletons of Middleton Place and the Draytons of Drayton Hall controlled the provincial government and determined the course of South Carolina's politics for almost half a century. One of the Barbadians was Robert Daniel, who arrived in 1690 and quickly established himself as a leading figure in local politics. An authentic military hero of the St. Augustine expedition, he was a highly controversial acting governor of South Carolina in 1716 and 1717.

We were Huguenots, French Protestants, suffering what we regarded as acute persecution during the reign of Louis XIV, coming to Carolina at the end of the seventeenth century. One of the Huguenots was Daniel Horry. A native of the ancient province of Angoumois, Horry arrived in Charleston in April 1692. Soon he married another Huguenot, Elizabeth Garnier, from the Isle de Ré off La Rochelle. The couple applied for English citizenship, but by the time their naturalization was granted several years later, Daniel had died.

We were Scots - three different kinds of Scots - lowlanders, highlanders, and the ambiguously designated Scotch-Irish, who were known in Britain as Ulster Scots (and other less pleasant names). Lowlanders were among the earliest Charleston merchants. In the early eighteenth century tens of thousands of Scotch-Irish came to South Carolina, becoming the great pioneers of the upcountry. Following the infamous highland clearances large numbers of Gaelic-speaking highlanders came to the Pee Dee region of South Carolina. Among the Scotch-Irish was young John Beaty, a native of County Cavan, Ireland, who emigrated to Carolina from Belfast around 1723. The name Beaty had been indigenous to the Scottish border since the fourteenth century. John Beaty's decision to emigrate to Carolina apparently did not meet with parental approval. His father left him one pound in his will in 1741, because "he hath been disobedient and behaved in such a manner as he is not entitled to my favor." Nevertheless, by 1736 John Beaty was a landowner in the newly-created Kingston Township.

Our ancestors brought the Old World with them in their heads. But folk culture is not so much a "possession" as it is a process. Our cultural roots are found not only in the interaction of Englishmen with Scotch-Irish and French Huguenots, but also with various other European ethnic groups with one another. We were German Lutherans in the Dutch Fork area near Columbia, Palatine Germans and Swiss at Purrysburgh on the Savannah, Welsh Baptists in the Welsh Neck area near Society Hill.

And we were Jews - among South Carolina's pioneer settlers. The Fundamental Constitutions (drafted by John Locke for the Lords Proprietors during the late seventeenth century) made South Carolina more hospitable to Jewish settlers than any other colony. South Carolina was not only the first political entity in the modern world where Jews could vote, but also the first where a Jew was elected to public office by his Christian neighbors. At the dawn of the nineteenth century, more Jews resided in South Carolina than any other state, and American Jewry's foremost congregation was synagogue K.K. Beth Elohim in Charleston.

Cultural traditions mixed in new and exciting ways. A variety of European cultures converged and modified one another. As Europeans of various ethnic back-

grounds mingled, a new culture, at first predominantly European in origins but different from any particular European culture, began to take shape.

European cultures were not the only Old World cultures transplanted to the New World. The story of South Carolina is also the story of the interaction among various African ethnic groups. And more of us were African than European. We were even more ethnically diverse than the Europeans. We spoke different and often mutually unintelligible languages. We came from various ethnic groups, from various kinds of societies, and from various regions of the huge African continent. From Senegal and the Gambia, from the Rice Coast, from Congo and Angola, we came by the shiploads, bringing with us rich cultural traditions. We were Fula or Fulani, Mandinka or Mende, Fante, Ashanti, and Yoruba. We were Congos and Angolas, Ibos from the Niger Delta, Coromantees from the Gold Coast, Muslims from the Guinea highlands. On any given morning in a Carolina rice field we might meet more Africans from more ethnic groups than we would have encountered in a lifetime in Africa. Men and women of various ethnic groups mixed - culturally and physically - in ways that rarely occurred in Africa. Guineas married Coromantees and Golas married Ibos. A new culture, at first predominantly African in origins, but different from any particular African culture, began to take shape. By the eighteenth century there was a higher proportion of Africans in the South Carolina lowcountry than could be found in any other region of mainland North America. In some lowcountry areas more than eight of every ten people in the lowcountry were African-born or descendants of Africans.

And we met more of us who were already here. We were Chicoras, Creeks, Choctaws and Cherokees; Sampits, Santees, Savannahs and Sewees; Yemasseees, Waterees, Waccamaws, and Westos. We were members of the great composite Catawba nation, composed partly of remnants of smaller tribal peoples.

And there was yet another acculturation process going on in early South Carolina. Our culture is more than static Old World legacies brought to the New World by Europeans or by Africans. It is the dynamic product of rich and complex interactions by Europeans and Africans with one another and with Native Carolinians. In the crucible of Carolina, the folk traditions of all Carolinians, native and newcomer alike, were stimulated and modified by one another. It was one of the world's great epics of culture change.

And we kept coming. We were Irish and Italian, Greek and Lebanese, Chinese and Vietnamese, Israeli and Hispanic. Our rich composition of peoples, origins, and traditions created a new culture, like a patchwork quilt, combining many distinctive elements, each differing dramatically in character, yet each contributing a special beauty to the whole.

* * * *

One who would understand South Carolina must examine the complex ways that the various strands of our folk culture have been interwoven over the past three centuries, exemplifying the ways that the lives of all of us have been interwoven. The rich patterns of our culture were woven by all kinds of Carolinians.

The primary way in which any people communicate with one another, entertain one another, link themselves into a community, give shape to a common culture, and transmit that culture to their posterity is through language. At its simplest, folk speech is defined as traditional deviations from standard speech. If we still define "standard speech" as the language taught in our schools (rather than the language we actually speak), we shall have to conclude that "folk speech" is a very broad category, including a host of variations in grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary. The artistry and creativity of our folk speech is one of the elements that continue to make our literature so exciting. South Carolina's most distinctive linguistic achievement was the slaves' creation of a common creole language called Gullah out of the convergence of their various African languages with one another and with the language of the people who claimed to own them. The reciprocal influence of Gullah and the regional standard still marks differences between lowcountry and upcountry accents, until recently most notably exemplified in the accents of our two United States Senators. But folk speech embodies even finer distinctions than merely between the state's most recognizable sections. Many Carolinians can discern linguistic differences in localities no more than nine miles apart, and one researcher has even explored linguistic differences among various neighborhoods in Charleston.

South Carolina folk culture is rich in the verbal arts of proverbs, legends, and folktales; and in our heritage of folksongs and ballads from Europe, especially from England and Scotland, including the great ballads, such as those Mary Boykin Chesnut learned from her grandmother. Our state is also rich in the grand and stately African American spirituals, which bring together the structure and rhythm of African music with melodic and textual elements of British folksong. A parallel tradition of white spirituals arose in the nineteenth century, harmonized and compiled into such shape-note songbooks as "Singing Billy" Walker's *Southern Harmony* and Benjamin F. White's *Sacred Harp*, each edited by a South Carolinian. The nation's first book-length field collection of any folk music, black or white, was *Slave Songs of the United States*, published in Boston in 1867. About half of the songs were collected on one South Carolina sea island - St. Helena Island off Beaufort. Among the best known folk songs first collected in South Carolina are the classic spirituals "My Lord, What

a Morning” and “Down by the Riverside”; the African American ballad “Delia” and the work song “Michael, Row the Boat Ashore,” which became popular hits of the 1960s folk revival; and the great anthems of the Civil Rights movement, “Eyes on the Prize” and “We Shall Overcome.”

Such distinguished collectors as Reed Smith, Francis W. Bradley, Chapman J. Milling, and Guy and Candie Carawan achieved national recognition with their collections of South Carolina folksongs. And folk music performers from South Carolina became international legends: Josh White from Greenville (President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s favorite folk singer); the virtuoso guitarist Rev. Gary Davis from Laurens; Wade and J.E. Mainer from Chester (whose old-time string band was billed as Mainer’s Crazy Mountaineers); the extraordinary banjo-picking and fiddling team of “Snuffy” Jenkins and “Pappy” Sherill from Columbia (whose old-time string band, the Hired Hands, was significant in the creation of bluegrass); the Moving Star Hall Singers from Johns Island and the Chosen Sisters from Plantersville, who kept alive the authentic African-American spirituals in the old-time lowcountry shouting styles; the Dixie Hummingbirds from Spartanburg, who pioneered the modern sound of gospel music; Dorsey Dixon from Darlington, composer of “Wreck on the Highway,” “Weave Room Blues,” and “Babies in the Mill”; his brother Howard and their sometime singing partner Jimmie Tarleton from Cheraw, composer of “Columbus Stockade Blues”; and the great blues singers Bertha “Chippie” Hill from Charleston, Pink Anderson and Simmie Dooley from Spartanburg, and Drink Small, the “Blues Doctor,” from Bishopville.

The state is especially esteemed for its unique forms of material culture. Perhaps the prized sweetgrass baskets of Mt. Pleasant are the most famous artifacts of Carolina culture. But the striking wrought-iron gates of Charleston’s blacksmith Philip Simmons, carrying on a family tradition that stretches back eight generations, have brought him honor as one of the nation’s greatest folk artists and a place in South Carolina’s Hall of Fame. Jennings Chestnut of Conway has been recognized as one of the South’s leading hand craftsmen for the fine mandolins he builds. The state is also recognized for three distinctive traditions of folk pottery. First, there is the low-fired unglazed earthenware known as Colono-ware, once made on lowcountry plantation sites by talented slave potters who incorporated elements of both African and Native American traditions. Second, there is Catawba Indian pottery from York County, strikingly innovative in its designs, but still made in the traditional hand-built and pit-fired manner, little changed in technology from the pre-contact era. Third, there is the renowned Edgefield stoneware, produced by potters both black and white (including the most renowned of all the potters, a slave folk artist and

poet known to collectors only as *Dave*). Edgefield potters created a distinctive alkaline-glazing process in which slaked wood ashes or lime are used to help melt the clay and sand and produce green to brown hues with a characteristic runny finish. It has become the dominant Southern pottery tradition, often produced by the same families for generations.

* * * *

My recent studies of Gullah culture in the South Carolina lowcountry have been given an added sense of urgency by an apprehension that a precious and hard-earned heritage in the coastal region is endangered by rapid resort development. The plantation where little Sabe Rutledge first learned the fascinating tales of Buh Rabbit is now an oceanfront resort named Surfside Beach, part of South Carolina's famous Grand Strand. Indeed all of All Saints Parish is undergoing rapid development at present, offering exclusive "resort plantation" addresses and designer golf courses to wealthy newcomers to our state.

Sabe Rutledge's daughter, Mary Burroughs, moved inland across the Waccamaw River to the site of another former plantation. As I drove down Martin Luther King Road to her house one day not so long ago, I noted that sewer lines were being installed, and there were rumors of a new highway. "Papa fixin' to tell dem lies, now," she remembered. "Make dem boys laugh. Tell all kind of stories." She smiled to recall his tales of Buh Rabbit. "Dat's all he *would* do. Make us laugh." She also remembered his stories of hags, haunts, and plat-eyes. "Papa used to scay [scare] me out of goin' to bed. Go to sleep put de cover over yuh head." As she recounted childhood memories of listening to her father tell tales, her own grandchildren were listening to soul music on the radio in the same room. Her daughter Mary Ann was working nearby at the Bucksport Marina restaurant, serving visitors who come down the Waccamaw on yachts. Outside, wooden surveyors' stakes, with their small orange flags fluttering in the warm Carolina breeze, pointed toward a future that may be as inhospitable to Gullah folk culture as other resort developments have been.

Some scholars believe that roots are dying, and that Gullah culture is doomed, and they may be right. The lowcountry is an area of endangered traditions as well as endangered natural resources. There is a link among historic preservation, environmental preservation, and cultural preservation. But I believe it would be premature to publish an obituary yet. Folk traditions always seem to be endangered, but they always seem to transform themselves in the face of social change. Gullah culture itself emerged when African traditions transformed themselves under the impact of the massive upheavals of the slave trade. Gullah culture was created and polished by generations of black Carolinians under appalling conditions of slavery and segrega-

tion. Gullah traditions may be endangered, but they are far from fragile. Mary Burroughs no longer tells the old stories she learned from her father. But her daughter still does.

* * * *

The Barbadians, the Huguenots, and the Scotch-Irish often despised one another in the crucible of the growing young colony. But as the generations passed, Europeans of various ethnic groups mixed here in ways that rarely occurred in Europe. Barbadians, Huguenots, and Scotch-Irish were able to put aside at least some of their ethnic prejudices. The great-granddaughter of the Huguenots Daniel and Elizabeth Horry married the grandson of the Scotch-Irish immigrant John Beaty. Their daughter married the great-grandson of the Barbadian Robert Daniel. And *their* granddaughter married a descendant of Scottish highlanders connected to Clan Cameron. The names of this last couple were Mary Eady Wilson and Nathan Paul. They lived in Horry County, and their granddaughter Kelly was my mother. The fusion of folk cultures in South Carolina is more than an abstraction to me.

* * * *

We South Carolinians - black and white - have a thing about history. To us it's something that continues from the past into the present. That's what visitors first notice about us. We look to the past with nostalgia and to the future with hope; for memory without hope is unbearable, and hope without memory is impossible. Our history is a long tragic legacy of black and white harnessed together in slavery and segregation, in guilt rather than innocence, in defeat rather than victory, embodying more failure than success. Some of it is so painful that it hurts. And our fierce almost unbearable incomprehension leaves us terrified and touchy. Some of the lessons of our history are inspiring, but more of them - and the most important of them - are cautionary. Ours is a history rich in experience.

Marketing a version of our history as heritage, often mistaking that version of our history for our heritage, we sometimes betray our real Carolina heritage - a heritage of courtesy and hospitality and cultural creativity. Claiming to defend our heritage, we are often false to its lessons, false to our better selves, and false to the great opportunities - and great responsibilities - that lie around us.

For we are the products not only of the *defeats* of our history but also of the *achievements* of our culture, a culture of folk and feeling - the rich and instructive humor of our Buh Rabbit tales; the haunting cadences of our majestic spirituals, our stately ballads, and our doleful but defiant blues; the awesome virtuosity of our jazz and bluegrass artists; the beauty of our prized sweetgrass baskets; our striking wrought-iron gates;

and our acclaimed Edgefield and Catawba pottery. These are in themselves serious and significant artistic expressions. But they also reveal the visions and values by which our ancestors have lived. They provide an insight into the very essence of South Carolina.

It is the sharing of cultural traditions in South Carolina that is more responsible than any other single factor for the extraordinary richness of our heritage - a heritage that empowers us to be proud without being blind, a heritage that allows us to cherish the good in our past without denying or defending the evil. For, whether stubbornly denied or acknowledged with pride, every black South Carolinian has a European heritage as well as an African one; and every white South Carolinian has an African heritage as well as a European one. A lot of our people still don't recognize it, but we were multicultural three centuries before multicultural was cool. For out of the cultural triangle of Europe, and Africa, and our native Carolina soil has emerged a profound and creative exchange that has given us a distinctive folk culture of great strength and of great beauty, a folk culture that unites all our people, perhaps in deeper ways than we even yet understand.

That is our *real* Carolina heritage, and all of us who have lived here have left our mark on it, just as it has left its mark on all of us. But we can never reach our potential as a state, and as a people, until we can accept our heritage as it really is. For to accept our heritage is to confront both the tragic failures of our history and the triumphant achievements of our culture, affording us a deeper and more compassionate understanding of the failures and triumphs of human beings everywhere, and a greater sense of where we are now, and of what we must be about.

To accept our heritage is not only to love the sands and salt-marshes of our lowcountry, the red clay of our midlands, and the hills and hollers of our upcountry, but also to love the rich diversity of our people, to love us, all of us. To accept our heritage is to embrace both our marvelous diversity and the essential unity underlying it, and to embrace our untold possibilities for shared achievement.

To accept our heritage is to understand that the old songs and the old tales, the old prayers and the old personal expressiveness are more than just quaint cultural artifacts. They are sources of strength that still enable us to cope with the hail and upheaval of life. They make up both our lifeline to generations gone before and our commitment to generations yet to come.

For just as South Carolina as we know it today is the result of what our ancestors did and failed to do yesterday, by what we do - and fail to do - today, we are creating the South Carolina of tomorrow.

What We Thought We Knew About Nineteenth-Century Black Carolinians and What We Know Now

Bernard E. Powers Jr.

ALMOST HALF A CENTURY AGO KENNETH STAMPP PUBLISHED HIS PATH-BREAKING BOOK *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South*. More sympathetic to the slave than any previous book of its kind, its appearance charted a new direction in slavery studies. Stampp's book is noteworthy for both its insights and shortcomings, and a couple of these are worth examining because they became the intellectual fodder for a generation of historians and we still grapple with some of the issues they raise, albeit in different ways. In Stampp's chapter entitled "Between Two Cultures," the author asserts that the slaves lived in a "cultural void" because they were shorn of their African roots and were simultaneously prevented from meaningful participation in the larger American society. Where "Africanisms" existed, Stampp says that these "were mere vestiges of their old cultures." Using Gullah as his example, Stampp says "a few African words remained in their speech; the rest was the crude and ungrammatical English of an illiterate folk." With such a negative assessment of what had survived, based on his reliance on planter sources and his limited ability to analyze them, Stampp inevitably concludes that "most ante-bellum slaves showed a desire to forget their African past and to embrace as much of white civilization as they could."¹ Even after making these assertions, Stampp recognized that slaves had "their own internal class structure," but he attributes it primarily to the masters' need for specialized labor and efficiency on the plantation. The result was the differentiation of the labor force into groups such as slave artisans, domestic servants, and drivers or foremen. Stampp also contended that "the stratification of slave society also resulted from an impelling force within the slaves themselves." However, he believed this force "manifested itself in their pathetic quest for personal prestige. Slaves yearned for some recognition of their worth as individuals, if only from those in their own limited social orbit. . . . Each slave cherished whatever shreds of self-respect he could preserve."²

Regardless of his conclusions, Stampp's work is important because it called our attention to the internal issues of the slave experience, to culture and structural differentiation among the slave population. Since publication of *The Peculiar Institution*, there has been an explosion of scholarship devoted to many of the issues raised in that book and we have benefited from the increasing sophistication of that scholarship. Because

of the size and character of its enslaved labor force, its significance for the South overall and the nature of its economy, the South Carolina experience has been crucial to the resultant slavery scholarship. In addition, many of the explorations of the slave experience have been catalysts for posing more sophisticated questions about black Carolinians and others in the South following the Civil War. The foregoing are the subjects of this presentation.

Thanks to the rigorous scholarship of the 1960s and beyond, we now realize that the shock of enslavement on the African side and the Middle Passage, while horrific experiences, were not sufficient to obliterate their victims' traditional culture. More than mere vestiges, in substantial and profound ways traditional African culture crossed the Atlantic Ocean. It took root in the New World and, adapting to its constraints and opportunities through a process of cultural melding or creolization, a new culture was created. John Blassingame's *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* pointed the way for a spate of future slave community studies that all attempted to provide an interior view of slavery from the enslaved's perspective. Blassingame was among the earliest mainstream scholars to rely upon the actual words of the slaves themselves, as he made extensive use of the WPA ex-slave interviews and actual slave narratives. The goal was to discern slaves' values, the sources of their culture, and the nature of their family life, as well as to debunk popular stereotypes. While recognizing slavery's horrors, the result was a newborn appreciation for the resiliency of an African-derived slave culture that bolstered the enslaved's self-esteem and served as a bulwark against some of the most abusive and potentially devastating features of their experience.³ Moving in a different but clearly related direction, Charles Joyner's *Down By the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community* issued a gentle cautionary note. Using this study of slave culture in Lower All Saints Parish, Georgetown District, the author reminded us that while all history is local, the extant historiography of slavery failed to adequately reflect this. Joyner said "historians describe *the* slave community without having probed in depth any *particular* slave community. . . . The unity of the society and the integration of the culture have been assumed, when in fact that unity and that integration are merely hypotheses until they have been demonstrated in specific instances."⁴

While slave community studies gave us a way to investigate general themes within slave society, we also gained a more sophisticated sense of its complexities. Expanding on Stampp's theme of a differentiated slave community, scholars such as Eugene Genovese focused on slave agency and the slaves' overall community, while also exploring the various roles played by enslaved people on the plantation, their interaction with one another and with whites. In the pages of his voluminous *Roll*

Jordan Roll: the World the Slaves Made, we find slave preachers and conjurers, men, women and children, fugitives as well as artisans, domestics and field hands as examples of the variety of ways people experienced enslavement.⁵

In examining stratification within the slave community historians traditionally identified the slave elite as being comprised of those people who lived and worked in proximity to the master. Chosen by the planters or their mistresses and working under their direction or their designees, this group normally included domestics, artisans, and drivers. Any perks of their positions were special privileges made available at the whim of the owners. In the traditional view less privileged slaves and field hands in general aspired to move into one of these positions. However, this assessment is from the master's point of view. Understanding the nature of slave work in South Carolina, however, has broadened our appreciation for how status could be achieved. We now know that domestics were not automatically accorded higher status by the other slaves, for while they had certain advantages, they also had marked disadvantages. Whereas the field hand was able to escape the owner's constant scrutiny and proximity, it was almost impossible for the domestic to do so. It was equally impossible for the domestic to demarcate his or her own time from that of the owner. Speaking directly to this issue, one Lowcountry visitor to a rice plantation was told by the planter that, although the domestics were better fed and clothed

every where the slaves preferred the field-work, chiefly, as far as I could learn, from its being definite in amount, which left them a certain portion of the day entirely to themselves. This privilege has become, virtually a right in many places; . . . whereas the house slave, from being liable to every call, early and late, sometimes fancies himself less free.⁶

Furthermore, certain unskilled manual jobs brought greater advantages and fewer disadvantages than either field or domestic work. The boatman is an example because he was able to travel, sometimes over great distances, to learn the lay of the land in other locations, and to work independently. Drivers had certain material rewards but were in an almost untenable situation, having to please two constituencies with diametrically opposed interests. For this reason, Genovese refers to the drivers as "Men in Between." Based upon this more complete understanding of the slave's interior world, John Blassingame, who pioneered in this work, contended that frequently, "Slaves reserved the top rungs of the social ladder for those blacks who performed services for other slaves rather than for whites."⁷ This meant conjurers, midwives, slave preachers, and root doctors, for example. Taking the last category, older women were often repositories of slave folk medicine. One man

remembered that on many plantations these women would “study what to do fer de ailments.” Another recalled his mother boiling fever grass tea to prevent fevers; sweet gum was extracted from the tree and taken for indigestion and “pine rosin pills” were prescribed for backache. Frequently invisible to the masters, healers played crucial roles for the enslaved people. That is why a northern teacher on the Sea Islands during the Civil War observed: “‘Learning’ with these people I find means a knowledge of medicine and a person is valued accordingly.”⁸

South Carolina’s Lowcountry planters organized their labor force according to the task system by which slaves were given a specified amount of work to be completed in a day; once finished, they could use the balance of the time for their own purposes. Planters thought tasking promoted a diligent and tractable work force, because especially in the Lowcountry slaves were commonly provided with garden plots for their personal cultivation. The opportunity to work one’s own land was deemed a sufficient inducement for the slaves to complete their task efficiently so they could work their own plots or engage in other forms of production. The task system predominated in the Lowcountry where the land holdings were large. Tasking could also be found along with the gang system in the Upstate, but its use was more limited there because average land holdings and slave garden plots were smaller, when provided at all. Tasking was applied as well to non-agricultural work such as rail splitting.⁹

Recent studies of slave labor have focused attention on how work shaped the character of slave life. The slaves’ independent production was often essential for basic subsistence. In the Midlands, Charles Ball recalled that while his master provided an abundance of bread and corn, “We were obliged to provide ourselves with the other articles, necessary for our subsistence.”¹⁰ Proximity to a friend enabled him to exchange corn for beans, which he considered a delicacy. A family’s diet could also be supplemented by the husband/father hunting or fishing or selling surplus agricultural products for cash. Lorenza Ezell, enslaved in Spartanburg County, recalled that on his plantation all the men were allowed to maintain gardens where they raised tobacco and cotton for sale. According to Ezell, however, such opportunities were rare in his region, which made life difficult because some planters failed to adequately feed their slaves.¹¹ Sam Polite’s situation on St. Helena was very different. Planters there sometimes gave a slave household two or three tasks worth of land around their cabins to plant. Their crops were supplemented by raising chickens and hogs for sale at a nearby store or directly to their master. Hunting and shrimping further enhanced the diet, and the income from independent production provided cash for the slaves to purchase other items. In another instance, several South Carolina planters observed that “negroes have every other Saturday [off],

keep horses, raise hogs, cultivate for themselves every thing for home consumption & for market that their masters do."¹² The purchase and sale of products by slaves in the market created what historians have called the slaves' internal or domestic economy. In the early nineteenth century (prior to 1817) as the Upstate was still a frontier and being settled, planters sometimes paid slaves to work on Sundays, a day on which by tradition they were released from working for their masters.¹³

This system was not without its critics. Some planters had concerns about how the slaves' commercial transactions in the market might undermine the racial order. For one thing, the customary privilege as routinely practiced was easily translated into a right. For example, the slave Susannah repeatedly protested her owner's intention to shoot the hogs she had raised along with her family. "No, massa, you cawnt do it. What can I do for our children's winter shoes and our salt if our pigs are shot? You cawnt do it—you cawnt do it." Even after her owner demanded she stop her impudence, Susannah continued to protest.¹⁴ Others feared that contact and eventually haggling with strange whites might lead to familiarity and breaches of acceptable racial etiquette. Worse yet, disreputable whites might encourage the slaves to steal crops from the master for sale in exchange for illicit products such as liquor. To reduce the subversive potential of the slave's commercial transactions, as early as 1834 the legislature prohibited anyone from trading with slaves except their masters. However, there were just too many opportunities for evasion for this law to be effective and its net effect was probably only to make such transactions more clandestine and circumspect.¹⁵

Planters also took matters into their own hands, sometimes prohibiting slaves from growing cotton and limiting their production to food crops. Other planters refused to allow their slaves to trade with outsiders and purchased their surplus goods themselves. Sometimes the value of goods the planters bought from their slaves was considerable. For example, in 1858 James Sparkman paid his slaves \$130.00 in cash and about \$110.00 in goods for the items they sold him during the year. The Southern Claims Commission records reveal some extraordinary cases of slave men who accumulated horses and mules valued between \$100.00 and \$200.00, which they used to expand their productive capacity. In addition to the foregoing, Pompey Smith of Beaufort County made sufficient cash through crop production that he was able to make loans to others. In the Upstate, there are cases where planters authorized credit lines at local stores for their slaves instead of furnishing cash.¹⁶

These observations are important for several reasons. First, early studies such as *The Peculiar Institution* were necessarily preoccupied with the formal legal structure of slavery and thus unable to discern significant aspects of its informal operation.¹⁷ However, recent slavery studies, focusing on the inner workings of the

master-slave relationship, show that sometimes Carolina slaves could purchase and hold property by customary practice, despite the absence of formal legal protection. Second, the health of Lowcountry slaves was likely better than their Upstate counterparts, benefiting as they did from the task and garden system and the more diversified diets that resulted. But the more salubrious upstate environment is an offsetting factor that has to be considered also. We need more definitive studies of the comparative morbidity and mortality rates for slaves in the three regions of the state. In *Them Dark Days*, William Dussinberre has taken the lead in investigating this for the Lowcountry.¹⁸ These studies will also shed further light on slave family formation and maintenance. Third, slaves with property were certainly held in high esteem within the slave community. They represent another heretofore underappreciated part of the slave elite. Unlike drivers, domestics, and other traditional members of the slave elite, who owed their privileged positions directly and entirely to the master, propertied slaves must have been admired for their own personal entrepreneurial achievements. Fourth, slave-held property had important connections to slave family life. If a person possessed property, in many cases it would have been worked by that individual along with other members of the family. Property combined with collective work would have been another basis for family solidarity. In addition, property accumulation may have been a way of further bolstering authority within the slave community. Larry Hudson's book *To Have and To Hold* shows how older slave landowners' ability to parcel land out to younger members of the family reinforced the senior members' control over the rising generation. This might have even obliged younger slaves to work their senior benefactor's land in old age. In such cases the most immediate benefactor could have been another slave and not necessarily the master.¹⁹

All the foregoing are potentially fruitful areas of further investigation. So is the connection between those who accumulated property and/or had access to it as slaves and property accumulation in the early years after Emancipation. When a WPA interviewer asked Sam Polite what, if any, benefit there was to slavery, his response was that it taught the slaves how to work. By this he meant that the informal economy allowed people to trade and acquire cash, and thereby engendered the entrepreneurial values which enabled Polite to purchase land after his emancipation.²⁰ In a fascinating case from 1862–63 Port Royal, one Northern observer characterized the freedman Limus as a "black Yankee" for his enterprise and resultant prosperity. The driver on a nearby plantation, Limus maintained a half-acre garden around his cabin and additional farmland on which he and his family raised vegetables, cotton, corn, poultry, and hogs. To complement his farming, Limus owned a large boat that he used to fish commercially and to transport goods and people

regularly to Hilton Head. By 1863 he had accumulated several hundred dollars in savings, hired at least two other freedmen to work for him, and was preparing to purchase land. While Limus had “but few equals on the islands,” our observer noted that “there are many who follow not far behind him.”²¹ The investigation of how free status translated into property accumulation after emancipation has already begun, but cases such as the foregoing have the potential for broadening our understanding of how the slave background also conditioned freedom in less than obvious ways.

Earlier I referred to the slave family as an economic unit. Prior to the rise of the social history of the 1960s, few scholars thought the slave family a subject worthy or even susceptible of investigation. When discussed at all, it was generally to explain contemporary African American social pathologies. What could be achieved as a result of historians’ new emphasis on the inner lives of the enslaved was compellingly embodied in Herbert Gutman’s path-breaking work, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom*. In a work that relied significantly on South Carolina data, its author documents the pivotal role families played for nineteenth-century African Americans through the recreation of family structures and analysis of wider kinship groups, births, and marital and naming patterns. In her recent book, *Chains of Love*, Emily West focuses attention on slave family life in antebellum South Carolina. Based on courtship practices, family structure, and especially cross-plantation marriages, West likewise posits a vital role for family among the enslaved.²²

Through the family, husbands/fathers and wives/mothers could frequently act out roles approximating those in the larger society and humanize their lives by doing so. By studying family life in relation to labor we now have a better appreciation for the roles of women. West contends that enslaved women suffered under a triple burden. They worked for their owners, they were also involved in household production for their own families, and finally they bore and raised the children. Our recognition that women experienced slavery differently than men has led historians to investigate the plight and roles of another distinct group: slave children. The family served as their principal source of education whereby the youngsters learned important skills; the carpenter could instruct the young son or the domestic could (and did) instruct the offspring with the expectation that he or she would be employed in the Big House. Slave children learned something far more vital, though: survival skills. They had to learn how to survive in the hostile world of slavery, which might mean stifling some of the most honest, natural, and youthful urges. One of the things young slaves had to be taught early on was to be mistrustful of whites and to never reveal the truth about certain subjects to them. So when as a young boy, Jacob Stroyer was whipped, his family held a prayer meeting that night. His father

prayed "Lord, hasten the time when these children shall be their own free men and women;" but young Stroyer knew better than to ever reveal those words outside the quarters. In this case, a slip of the tongue could jeopardize lives. Socialization and acculturation to the mores of the slave community were of vital importance.²³

As African people black Carolinians had a well-developed spiritual life despite their enslavement. Most scholars knew that Africans were mainly strangers to Christianity in the eighteenth century. However, given Kenneth Stampp and others' assertion of the slaves' cultural marginalization, many assumed their rather quick and extensive embrace of Christianity by the early nineteenth century. In fact, Genovese's *Roll Jordan Roll* asserts that "the mass" of the slaves became christianized in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, although he does admit that the process was slower in South Carolina.²⁴ However, in recent years historians have reconceptualized the antebellum African and African American encounter with Christianity; important scholars now conclude that only a minority amounting to perhaps a quarter of enslaved people were christianized even in the late antebellum period.²⁵ The reasons for this conclusion are several. Initially language problems retarded formal and informal missionary efforts. African religions were prevalent in the colonial era and continued to inform the religious sensibilities of enslaved people throughout the antebellum years. This was especially the case in South Carolina because of the nature of slavery here and also because its slave population was somewhat re-Africanized after the foreign slave trade was reopened here and 39,000 additional Africans were introduced before 1808.²⁶ Jacob Stroyer's father was from Sierra Leone. When Charles Ball entered Midlands South Carolina in the early nineteenth century, he encountered "a great many African slaves . . . and [he reported] they continued to come in for several years afterwards." He became acquainted with many of them and found those who preserved their original religions especially noteworthy. Reflecting on his general experience in the cotton South, Ball emphatically rejected the idea that the average slave was a Christian.²⁷ Finally, in South Carolina there was little interest in missionary work until the 1830s, as the planters feared Christianity would damage their slaves by introducing dangerous ideas and attitudes that would make them less valuable.²⁸

White attitudes begin to change by the 1830s as calls for reform rose in the face of the abolitionist onslaught and after it became clear in the cases of Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner that slaves were developing their own understanding of Christian tenets. Masters now wanted to shape the Christian message imparted to enslaved people.²⁹ Some of the other barriers to religious change also diminished with time. Only in recent years have we begun to understand the factors that promoted reli-

gious change and the intricacies and nuances of the conversion process. In his recent book, *Exchanging Their Country Marks*, Michael Gomez provides one of the most sophisticated expositions of the process to date. He contends that certain key elements in Christianity were similar enough to African religions that Africans could have understood them generically. So, for example, both faiths have high-most creator gods. The Christian God has a son and another component, the Holy Ghost or Holy Spirit. This was consonant with the multiplicity of the Africans' deities. The idea of God's son going through a process of death and resurrection seems similar to the idea of reincarnation shared by the Igbo, Akan, and other West and South Central Africans. Although there is no idea of original sin in African belief systems, there is the concept of blood sacrifice as a gesture of homage, respect, and reconciliation. Other elements in biblical Christianity would also have been familiar to Africans. Miraculous events, signs from the spirit world, trances, spirit possession, speaking in tongues, and dreams were regular occurrences in the Bible and on a basic level would not have been completely unfamiliar to Africans. Thanks to the work of Robert Farris Thompson, Margaret Creel, Sterling Stuckey, and others, we understand the role of water rituals among peoples such as the BaKongo. Africans' generic familiarity with such rites could eventually be translated into the concept of Christian baptism, which involved its own unique process of ritual death and rebirth.³⁰

Whereas historians were once satisfied with finding the proverbial "Africanisms" in the New World, Charles Joyner's work on South Carolina encouraged examination of the creolization of African sensibilities and spirits with Christian forms. Because of his and other more recent studies we now understand that the Afro-Christianity of the slave was initially probably much more African than orthodoxly Christian. This point cannot be over emphasized, because traditionally we have seen the process of Christian conversion going in a single direction; but in point of fact there were two processes occurring simultaneously. African people had to make Christianity intelligible and functional within their own cultural frameworks before they could accept it. Christianity became Africanized at the same time that African people became Christians.³¹

Certainly the ring shout was one of the most important Africanized manifestations of nineteenth-century black Carolinians' Christianity. There were many circle dances done in Africa, and the most important were performed on the most significant ceremonial occasions such as funerals. Dance in Africa on these occasions had a sacred function intended to elicit the presence of the gods or ancestral spirits. Normally done in a counter-clockwise fashion, the devotees danced and sang to musical accompaniment, usually a drum, as a part of the ceremony. The circle dances

crossed the Atlantic with Africans who recreated and adapted them for Christian worship here in South Carolina and other places. The ring shout was the result. During the Civil War, a Northern teacher at Port Royal attended services at a local praise house. "When the formal meeting was over," the benches were pushed back to the wall, and young and old, male and female

all stand up in the middle of the floor, and when the 'sperichil' is struck up, begin first walking and by-and-by shuffling round, one after the other, in a ring. The foot is hardly taken from the floor, and the progression is mainly due to a jerking, hitching motion, which agitates the entire shouter, and soon brings out streams of perspiration. Sometimes they dance silently, sometimes as they shuffle they sing the chorus of the spiritual, and sometimes the song itself is also sung by the dancers. . . . Song and dance are alike extremely energetic, and often, when the shout lasts into the middle of the night, the monotonous thud, thud of the feet prevents sleep within half a mile of the praise-house.³²

The ring shout, while dramatic, only represents one of many aspects of the Christian slave's highly Africanized spiritual world.

One of the central points of this presentation is that historians have increasingly recognized differentiation within the slave experience and in recent years have developed more sophisticated ideas about class, status, culture, and cultural change among the enslaved. The resultant body of research carried over into the study of the post-Civil War years, a process complicating the African American experience but allowing us to explore its dimensions more completely. Studies with a focus on South Carolina or evidence from the state have played important roles in that process, and I would like to provide some illustrations in the final part of this exposition.

While we still believe that there is something called "the" African American experience, scholars are more aware than ever before of how that experience has been mediated by important factors such as class. In *Black Charlestonians A Social History*, I attempted to examine, among other subjects, the city's post-bellum class structures and their meaning for the differential experience of freedom. An upper class consisting of less than two percent of the black population had developed by 1880. Its main components were skilled workers, professionals, and those with comparatively significant amounts of real estate. Of its members at least forty percent were free before the war and 96 percent could read and write. They enjoyed a significantly different lifestyle from those who were generally less prosperous and typically

consigned to unskilled labor and property-less. The elite maintained exclusive voluntary associations and within its ranks there was an even more exclusive aristocratic group comprised of antebellum free persons of color and their descendants. The members of the elite were most able to send their children routinely to schools, including private schools and later even colleges. Avery Institute, organized in 1865 by the American Missionary Association, was the premiere private school for Black Charlestonians and was noteworthy for its normal and college preparatory curriculum. While most of the students who attended Avery were freedmen, the most advanced classes were dominated by the children of Charleston's upper class and especially those of the antebellum free brown elite. Many of Avery's graduates went on to become teachers in the rural schools of South Carolina.³³ The foregoing experiences were atypical for black Carolinians and for black southerners in general. So looking at the consequences of emancipation refracted through the lens of class produces markedly different results.

Until Thomas Holt's work on South Carolina's Reconstruction politics, most revisionist historians were still preoccupied with repairing the image of the South's first generation of black politicians. In *Black Over White*, Holt went beyond the traditional binary divisions of black and white to discover how class divisions among African American leaders affected their political behavior. One of Holt's most important conclusions was that politicians of elite and antebellum free backgrounds tended to be more conservative on economic proposals designed to benefit the working class than their counterparts of slave backgrounds. Conversely, the most aggressive proponents of civil rights legislation tended to be members of the elite. This fundamental class division between black politicians was one internal factor that weakened the Republican Party in the state and contributed to its demise by 1877.³⁴ Holt's systematic examination of the interplay of antebellum status and class with political behavior allowed us to look at old questions in new ways. Holt's analysis was also consonant with the growing recognition of a differentiated African American experience, so well documented for the slave era.

In the cities of the post-Civil War South, black churches were typically divided along the lines of class and culture. Their evolution even within the same denomination helps us discern how the freedmen interpreted the meaning of emancipation. Reginald Hildebrand's *The Times Were Strange and Stirring* focuses on the varieties of Methodism in the postbellum South, while developing a typology of denominational cultures, each reflective of a different view of freedom. The first group of Colored Methodist bishops, including the Carolinian Richard Vanderhorst, had been privileged slaves, without formal education, and they eschewed politics. The denomination had

the most conservative expectations for emancipation of all the Methodists and retained a close working relationship with the Southern Methodist Church. By contrast, the African Methodist Episcopal Church had a long tradition of political activism and was destined to become the largest black Methodist denomination in South Carolina. Its leadership aggressively promoted political involvement, civil rights, and higher education. Its preachers perceived their church in black nationalist terms and their mission as one designed to rejuvenate the race. The third example, the Northern Methodist Episcopal Church, held out the theoretical possibility for interracial cooperation within the same denomination and the demise of racial caste. Although they promised more than they actually delivered, its leaders were the most politically active and they represented the most direct challenge to white supremacy. So the Methodist case reveals that even though these two southern denominations were not fundamentally different from one another theologically and organizationally, each did represent black Carolinians' different and sometimes conflicting conceptions of freedom.³⁵

So it is that emancipation and its consequences consisted of many variations on a theme, just as enslavement had. Our more complete understanding of differentiation within the institution of slavery has enabled us to explore and appreciate more fully the contours of what emancipation and freedom meant. Even today we do not know everything there is to know about these experiences; in fact, we do not even know everything we thought we once knew, and that is a good thing. Because of its significance as a site, South Carolina has been and will continue to be in the vanguard of refining and redefining what we know about these subjects.

NOTES

1. Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York: Vintage, 1956), 333–34, 363–64.
2. Ibid.
3. John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972).
4. Charles Joyner, *Down by the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), xvi–xvii.
5. Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon, 1974).
6. Willie Lee Rose, ed., *A Documentary History of Slavery in North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 306.
7. Modern slavery studies reevaluated the position of drivers as members of the slave community, but their role is yet to be fully explored in South Carolina agricultural life. For a discussion of the

difficulties and ambiguities of the drivers' position see: Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll*, 365–388 and William L. VanDeburg, *The Slave Drivers: Black Agricultural Labor Supervisors in the Antebellum South* (Westport: Greenwood, 1979); For their role in the Lowcountry see William Dusinger, *Them Dark Days: Slavery in the American Rice Swamps* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); John W. Blassingame, "Status and Social Structure in the Slave Community: Evidence From New Sources," in *Perspectives and Irony in American Slavery*, ed. Harry P. Owens (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1976), 142.

8. *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers Project 1936–1938*, Manuscript Division Library of Congress, South Carolina Narratives, 14 pt.1:171, pt.2: 55–56, available at <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html>, accessed May 15, 2005; Elizabeth W. Pearson ed., *Letters from Port Royal, 1862–1868* (Boston: W.B. Clarke Co.1906; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1969), 25.

9. Larry Hudson, *To Have and to Hold: Slave Work and Family Life in Antebellum South Carolina* (Athens: University of Georgia, 1997), 13–15, 66–67; John Campbell, "As 'A Kind of Freeman'?: Slaves' Market Related Activities in the South Carolina Up Country, 1800–1860," in *Cultivation and Culture: Labor and the Shaping of Slave Life in the Americas*, ed. Ira Berlin and Philip Morgan (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 244–45, 254–57.

10. Charles Ball, *Slavery in the United States: A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Charles Ball* (New York: John S. Taylor, 1837), 132–33.

11. *Born in Slavery*, 16 pt 2:25–26.

12. *Ibid.*, 14 pt.3:271–72; As quoted in Loren Schweninger, *Black Property Owners in the South 1790–1915* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 31.

13. Campbell, "As 'A Kind of Freeman'?" Walker: 246–49.

14. Leslie Schwalm, *A Hard Fight For We: Women's Transition From Slavery to Freedom in South Carolina* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1997), 63.

15. Campbell, "As 'A Kind of Freeman'?" Walker: 251, 258.

16. Hudson, *To Have and To Hold*, 19, 23–24; Campbell, "As 'A Kind of Freeman'?" Walker: 266.

17. Stampp, *Peculiar Institution*, 197.

18. Dusinger, *Them Dark Days*.

19. Hudson, *To Have and to Hold*, 53–54.

20. *Born in Slavery*, 14 pt. 3:275–76.

21. Pearson, *Letters*, 37–38.

22. Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery & Freedom, 1750–1925* (New York: Pantheon, 1976); Emily West, *Chains of Love: Slave Couples in Antebellum South Carolina* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

23. Jacob Stroyer, *My Life in the South* (Salem: Salem Observer Book and Job Print, 1885), 24; Thomas Webber, *Deep Like the Rivers: Education in the Slave Quarter Community 1831–1865* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), 63, 71–72.

24. Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll*, 184, 186.

25. Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory & the Foundations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 37; Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 260–61.
26. Stamp, *Peculiar Institution*, 25.
27. Stroyer, *My Life in the South*, 9; Ball, *Slavery in the United States*, 164–65.
28. Ball, *Slavery in the United States*, 164.
29. Janet D. Cornelius, *Slave Missions and the Black Church in the Antebellum South* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 47–50; Rev. Dr. Richard Furman's *Exposition of The Views of the Baptists, Relative to the Coloured Population In the United States in A Communication to the Governor of South-Carolina* (Charleston: A.E. Miller, 1838), 24.
30. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 277–79; Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1983), 76, 106–9; Margaret W. Creel, "A Peculiar People:" *Slave Religion and Community-Culture Among the Gullahs* (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 319; Stuckey, *Slave Culture*, 34–35.
31. Joyner, *Down By the Riverside*, chap. 5. For another example of recent scholarship which focuses on the active agency of African peoples in shaping religious change see: Sylvia R. Frey and Betty Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion: African American Protestantism in the American South and British Caribbean to 1830* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1998), xii.
32. Pearson, *Letters*, 26–27.
33. Bernard E. Powers Jr., *Black Charlestonians: A Social History 1822–1885* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1994), chapter 6.
34. Thomas Holt, *Negro Political Leadership in South Carolina during Reconstruction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 123, 143–51, 162–63, 220–21.
35. Reginald Hildebrand, *The Times Were Strange and Stirring: Methodist Preachers and the Crisis of Emancipation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), xiii–xxii, 97, 107.

From Cotton Fields to Classrooms: South Carolina Women Tell the Story of a Changing Countryside

By Melissa Walker

REVOLUTIONS IN RACE RELATIONS AND REALIGNMENTS IN POLITICS shook South Carolina during the twentieth century, but few changes have more profoundly rocked the daily lives of most South Carolinians than the exodus from the state's farms. In 1900, most South Carolinians made their living by farming, but the twentieth century saw a long slow exodus from the countryside. By 2000, fewer than one percent of South Carolinians lived on working farms, and of those who operated the state's 24,400 farms, fewer than half considered farming to be their primary occupation.¹ In short, at the beginning of the century, most South Carolinians farmed; by the end of the century, very few did.

The number of South Carolinians living on farms was not the only thing that changed in the twentieth century. The types of farming that dominated the state and the way that farmers worked changed as well. At the turn of the century, cotton, corn, and tobacco were the state's principal crops. Most of the state's farm operators were tenants, working land that belonged to someone else and eking out a meager existence on fewer than 75 acres with little hope of improving their standard of living. Families worked the land with mulepower and manpower. Over the course of the century, however, the state's farmers diversified and mechanized. They turned to peaches, organic vegetables, soybeans, hogs, poultry, and beef cattle—abandoning the old staples of cotton, corn, and tobacco. By the last decades of the 1900s, most South Carolina farmers were landowners, and they farmed around 200 acres using tractors, combines, and all manner of mechanical equipment, chemical fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides.²

The temblors that shook the state's farm economy reverberated through the lives of South Carolina's farm people, male and female. As the nature of farming changed, men and women carved out new niches on and off the farm. In this essay, I will share the stories told by three South Carolina women who journeyed from cotton fields and barnyards to classrooms and the halls of the United States Congress to show you how women experienced and shaped the transformation of the rural South.

In order to understand the lives of women in this changing economy, it is important to know something about the way that farm families understood the family economy and the place of women in it. Farmers, like all workers, seek to "make a living." Today we associate making a living with earning a cash income, and we tend to think of the farmer's living as the money he or she receives from selling livestock

and cash crops. That understanding of making a living to some degree describes the market-oriented, specialized commercial agriculture that we usually see today, but early in the twentieth century, most farm families combined subsistence and market-oriented economic activities in ways that were calculated to meet their own goals of independence, well-being, and family persistence on the land.³

As a result, early twentieth century farmers did not equate making a living with simply earning money. They understood the family economy in broader and more complex terms. The family economy included everything the farm family did to support itself. This included raising livestock and crops to sell, but it also involved providing the family's subsistence—the things they needed from day to day. Raising a garden was part of the family economy. So was caring for a milk cow. Canning and drying foods for the winter were also part of the family economy. All three of these activities fell within the province of farm women. Even cutting back on expenses was an economic act. For every dollar that a farm wife saved by making instead of buying her daughters' dresses or her husband's shirts, another dollar was available to buy seed corn, purchase a mule, or pay real estate taxes. Farm women also earned money. They sold butter and eggs to buy schoolbooks or the staple foods they could not produce at home. Many even worked in the fields, comprising an essential part of the labor force that produced farm commodities for the market. In other words, the work of men AND women proved essential to the survival of the farm family AND the survival of the farm.⁴

The transformation of the Southern farm economy in the twentieth century changed women's place in the family economy and the types of work they performed. As Southerners increasingly turned to specialized commercial agriculture, farm women's subsistence and petty commodity production became less important. Still, farm women remained central to the family economy, shifting their efforts to working in the commercial farming operation or to taking off-farm jobs that contributed to the family economy in different ways.

The lives of three women add texture to our picture of the changes in the state's agricultural economy. Two women, one white and one black, were born to sharecropping families in the early twentieth century. Their experiences illuminate the changes experienced by the vast majority of South Carolina's farm families—the landless—as the century progressed. Both were born in poverty, yet both rose to the middle class. One stayed in the South her entire life, the other left and returned in old age, but both their lives were profoundly shaped by their upbringings on South Carolina farms. The third woman was younger. Born in town, she became a farm wife at mid-century. She and her husband were prosperous landowners who ran into trouble during the agricultural crisis of the 1970s and 1980s. The choices she made

illustrate the new challenges facing farm families at the end of the century and the new ways that farm wives confronted these challenges.

The first woman, Mary Webb Quinn, was born in Spartanburg County, one of nine surviving children of white sharecropping parents. Like most farmers in the South Carolina Piedmont, the Webbs grew cotton for the market and produced most of their own food as well. Mary remembered a happy childhood in spite of the fact that

life was hard, and we were poor people and we knew that we were. . . . And we had friends and they were in the same boat we were in. If somebody was a little bit better off, well, everybody helped each other. . . . But yet, we knew that there were other ways of making a living, that there was money out there and that some people had nicer clothes.⁵

Her statement tells us a great deal. On some level, Mary and her brothers and sisters knew that some people lived a different kind of life, one with more material resources than the Webb family enjoyed. She added, “[W]e did have a little bit of envious feeling for our town cousins. They had electric power and water running in the pipes, and we didn’t have that at all out in the country.” But she also knew that her own life was much like the lives of most of her neighbors. Perhaps more important, she testifies to the important role that mutual aid played in rural South Carolina communities. People shared resources—garden produce, tools, and labor. This sharing enabled everyone to live a little better. The family’s work also enabled them to enjoy a varied diet. Of her town cousins, Mary said, “I never realized at the time that they also were a little envious of all the food that we had. They liked to come out on weekends and sit down at Aunt Edna’s table and enjoy the bounty of our big gardens.” She went on to describe the prodigious amount of household food production done by the women in her family. She laughed, “Well, it wasn’t actually a garden; it was crops of sweet potatoes and okra and tomatoes and green beans and all that kind of stuff. And those women worked.” [her emphasis]

Just as she emphasized the hard work involved in feeding the family, Mary Quinn also stressed the hard work involved in farming. She noted that all the children worked in the fields. In the process, they developed a strong work ethic, persistence, and fortitude. She added, “We have good genes that have been passed on from hard working on down the line. We had grandparents who went through the rough times and they survived and had a good life and passed on their attitudes to all of us. I think all of that plays a part in a good attitude. . . .”

Quinn recalled how she became aware of the fact that she might pursue some other life besides eking out a living on the farm. She explained,

In the fourth grade, I can remember that Paul Dorman came into my classroom; he was the superintendent of schools and he had the teacher's checks. . . . And I remember that he just opened my eyes, and I thought, 'well, for this you get paid and this is what I want to do. I want to be a teacher.' And from that moment on, my ambition was to be a teacher. And I didn't know how I was going to do it; I just knew it was going to happen.

Fortunately Mary's parents valued education. She said,

One of the things that my dad always said was that he felt like he owed his children a high school education. He didn't have one. He was pretty much a self-educated man and knew a lot about a lot of things and did a lot of reading. And I think from him, I developed my love for reading because as we worked and picked cotton and one thing and another, we would discuss books that we had read and he would tell me how important it was that people learned to read and to discuss things that they had read and [the family discussion] was things that you would remember for a long time. So, what he said, he owed us a high school education, but he didn't owe us a college education. If we went to college, we were going to have to help ourselves.

Working in a shirt factory, Mary managed to put herself through Textile Industrial Institute, a two-year college in Spartanburg that offered students the opportunity to combine study with work.⁶ After she finished her two-year program, Mary Webb worked another year to save money for her tuition at Winthrop University, then the state-supported women's college in Rock Hill. At Winthrop, she majored in home economics, and after graduation she taught school in Chester County.

Mary finished Winthrop during World War II. About this time, she met Eldred Quinn, the son of a neighboring sharecropper home on leave from the Army. After Eldred shipped out to Europe, the couple continued to correspond and fell in love. They married after Eldred's return from military service. The changes in their lives at that point illuminate the profound changes set in motion in the Southern agricultural economy by the Great Depression and World War II. The farm relief programs of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal made cash payments to landowners, enabling them to buy tractors and other machinery to increase their productivity and decrease their labor needs. As a result, many sharecroppers found themselves replaced by tractors and cotton pickers and combines while others found it increas-

ingly difficult to compete in a farm economy dominated by mechanized farms.⁷ Thousands of landless farmers left the land. On the heels of the changes wrought by New Deal programs, World War II created unprecedented prosperity in the South. Even before Pearl Harbor, factories inside and outside the region had begun to increase production, generating new jobs. The South's farm population declined by 22 percent during World War II as people flocked to the military and to wartime off-farm jobs. The trend continued after the war as the GI Bill made it possible for many returning veterans to obtain enough education to leave farming for other occupations.⁸

"Farming changed after World War II. And the crops changed, too," Mary Webb Quinn noted. World War II stimulated a revolution in American agricultural productivity that would further transform rural life. Many South Carolina farmers abandoned cotton, opting for more profitable crops. Others planted orchards or raised livestock.⁹ Machinery and new chemical fertilizers and pesticides changed everything for farmers, but these innovations also proved expensive, making it increasingly difficult for small farmers to operate profitably.¹⁰

New educational and industrial opportunities and changes in farming practices resulted in a mass exodus from the rural South. By mid-century, small landowners and sharecroppers abandoned the countryside in droves. Soon Eldred Quinn and his bride joined them. Eldred tried sharecropping for about a year after he returned from wartime service, but he found it next to impossible to earn any money, so he chose to use his G.I. Bill educational benefits to earn a bachelor's degree at Clemson University. The young couple moved to Clemson where Mary taught at Keowee High School while Eldred attended college. After graduation, Eldred joined the sales force of a farm equipment manufacturer. The couple lived in Georgia and Alabama, where Mary gave birth to three children. In the late 1950s, they returned to South Carolina where both taught at Boiling Springs High School until they retired in the 1980s.

In Mary Quinn's life, we see some of the enormous changes rural South Carolinians experienced in the twentieth century. A combination of factors made it possible for Mary to leave the cotton fields of her youth for the classrooms of her adulthood, and she eagerly embraced these new opportunities. Mary Quinn paints a vivid picture of early twentieth century life on a South Carolina sharecropping farm. It was a life dominated by hard work and strong ties to family and community, a world where children developed character traits that would stand them in good stead off the farm.

Margaret Christine Nelson was also the daughter of a South Carolina sharecropper. An African American, she was born in Summerton in 1908. The youngest of seven children, Margaret's grandmother raised her after her parents died. With the help of

Margaret and her siblings, the grandmother supported the family by sharecropping cotton in a variety of locations in Clarendon County. When asked who did the farming, Margaret explained that the entire family pitched in to do the farm work but that her grandmother “was the head of it.” Margaret’s grandmother was not unusual. Hundreds of women of both races headed sharecropping households in the early twentieth century.

Margaret described her grandmother as a strong woman who “always told us keep looking up, never look down, keep looking up and keep doing your best.”¹¹ Margaret’s grandmother believed that education was essential to a better life, so she insisted that the children attend school during the brief sessions offered in early twentieth century rural black schools.

As Margaret’s siblings matured, they left the family home to work their own sharecropping plots or take off-farm jobs. Like most sharecroppers, particularly African Americans, Nelson’s family found that the sharecropping system left them vulnerable to exploitation from landowners. Typically, a landowner provided the sharecropper’s family with a plot of land and a small house in exchange for a share of the crop. Sharecroppers needed credit to purchase food, clothing, seed and other supplies in the months before they sold their crops. The landowner or another local merchant generally provided this credit, securing the loan with a lien against the future crop. At harvest time, the crop was sold, and the sharecropper received whatever was left over after the year’s debt was paid and the landlord took his share of the crop. Much of the time, there was little left, and many years sharecroppers were not able to pay off what they owed, instead sinking further and further into debt. Although many landlords were honest and fair, many others used the furnishing system to gouge tenants with high interest rates and outrageous prices, and some landowners cheated tenants outright. Black tenants, in particular, might face arrest, eviction, or violence if they challenged the landlord’s accounting of what was owed at the end of the year.¹² Apparently this was the situation faced by Margaret Nelson’s family. Margaret noted that one brother “got discouraged with them taking all the cotton, all the money, and he knowed that we didn’t owe all that money. . . . He said, ‘no, we’re being robbed. I’m not going to work it anymore.’” Like many African-American sharecroppers, Margaret’s brother took advantage of expanding opportunities for industrial employment, moving first to Pittsburgh where he worked at Pittsburgh Glass Company and later to Wilmington, North Carolina, where he held a skilled job in a fertilizer manufacturing plant. She added, “[T]hat’s where he worked until he died. But that was really nice that he got that kind of job because he was getting paid at that time thirty-five dollars a week . . . [and] that was a lot of money.”

For a time after her brothers had moved away from the family farm, Margaret and a cousin worked four acres of land that her grandmother rented. She explained that by this time, "We didn't let [my grandmother] go back in the field anymore." The girls raised corn, peas, and potatoes for their own use. In addition they did laundry for the landlord's wife and worked in the fields as day laborers to earn some cash. "We were independent girls," she maintained. She noted that she and her cousin routinely cut loads of firewood with girls from a neighboring farm. "We would go in the woods in the winter and we would cut wood and take one load to their house and one load to our house. So we had firewood for winter. So we learned to make our own life and we were happy."

After a couple of years on the rented land, Margaret and her grandmother joined her brother in Wilmington. Nelson eventually married and spent much of her adult life in and around White Plains, New York. Here she raised two step-daughters as well as four daughters of her own. Margaret did not forget her grandmother's lessons about working hard, doing one's best, and valuing education as she raised her daughters. "At whatever you do, do your best. . . . [T]hat's my motto. . . . I always told [my daughters] that I didn't expect them to come home with all A's but do your best, and they did, thank God. . . . Through junior high, through high school, and through college, nobody was left behind." She and her husband managed to send all six daughters to college in spite of the fact that "when my first child started to go to college, we didn't even have a bank account. . . . The day when my youngest daughter . . . graduated from college that was a happy, humble rewarding day. . . . And sitting there, there were all kinds of wealthy people's children there and there we were."

Nelson's story provides details about how black men and women coped with the changes that swept the Southern countryside. Like many landless African Americans, Margaret Nelson's family left behind the poverty and uncertainty of farming for new opportunities in southern and northern cities. They focused on educating their children, and in the process, they moved into the middle class. Like Mary Quinn, Nelson credits her family and her rural upbringing with instilling the independence and work ethic that enabled her success. Nelson's life also reflects larger trends in another way. Like many blacks who went North for work, Nelson came home to the South again upon retirement, resettling in Summerton after the death of her husband.

In contrast to Quinn and Nelson, who were born on farms and left the land, Kate Graham came to farm life as an adult. The daughter of a textile mill manager, Kate Graham was born in a Spartanburg County mill village in the 1920s. She laughingly described herself as a "linthead married to a hayseed."³

While a student at Converse College, Kate met William Graham, a student at neighboring Wofford College. The two married during the Korean War. After his

military service, the young couple returned to Lee County to run the farm that had been in his family since antebellum days. With the help of nineteen sharecropping families, the Grahams produced cotton and tobacco. By the end of the 1950s, William Graham had begun the process of mechanization, gradually replacing the sharecroppers who moved away or died.

During the early years of her marriage, Kate Graham focused on raising her five children and performing the traditional tasks of a farm wife. The Grahams were considerably more prosperous than either Mary Quinn's or Margaret Nelson's families. Kate recalled, "I was a full-time mom, and I was very very fortunate that I had help in the house and in the garden, because of course, we had a big garden."

In spite of enjoying household help, Kate Graham's days were an unending round of work familiar to most farm wives of the era. Much of her time was occupied with raising and preserving the family's food supply, but the technology had changed. Unlike Mary Quinn's mother, Kate Graham did more freezing than canning. She explained, "We filled three freezers every summer. Two for us, and my sister-in-law . . . and I would fill William's mother's freezer because by then . . . she couldn't go in the garden like we could."

When her youngest child entered kindergarten, Kate began teaching at the elementary school he attended. As she explained, "I took him to kindergarten and I went to my classroom." By joining the work force, Kate Graham was joining legions of South Carolina's mid-twentieth century farm wives who contributed to the family economy by taking off-farm jobs. Her earnings helped her family to maintain a middle-class standard of living, enjoying material goods and educational opportunities that they might not otherwise have been able to enjoy if they had relied solely on farm income. Kate's salary helped put all five children through college.

Kate Graham's decision to enter the workforce was made in the context of a rapidly changing South Carolina countryside. Most landless people left farming by the 1960s, leaving fewer farmers who farmed on a significantly larger scale. Farmers in the last half of the twentieth century struggled to succeed in the face of more and more factors beyond their control. High overhead costs, low commodity prices, and increasing foreign competition squeezed American farmers. Moreover, shifts in federal agricultural policy made the postwar generation of farmers increasingly dependent on federal crop subsidies for financial survival.¹⁴

By the mid-1970s, the Grahams were facing a crisis not unlike that faced by farmers all over the nation. Overextended and unable to borrow operating funds from traditional lenders, the Grahams turned to the Farmers Home Administration for a loan in the late 1970s. Although low commodity prices left them unable to pay

off this loan at the end of the year, an eager FmHA official encouraged them to borrow more money the following year, using their increasingly valuable land as collateral. Still, farm commodity prices continued to plunge and operating costs escalated. Kate Graham's stories about this time demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of the obstacles faced by modern commercial farmers. She explained,

[I]f you cannot make a profit, you cannot stay in business. And there was no way that we could make a profit. I think that one year, . . . we got as much for our cotton as William's great-grandfather had during the War Between the States. And I think that what the general public does not understand, think about a really big tractor. \$150,000 for the tractor. . . . The general public will pay that much for a house, and that will be a once in a lifetime investment for them. But for a farmer, he's going to have to replace it in ten years.

Soon the Grahams found themselves on the brink of foreclosure, unable to meet their interest payments, much less pay off their loans.

Kate Graham and her husband were part of a new generation of farmers who did not passively watch their farming dreams disintegrate. Educated and politically savvy, they joined the ranks of farmers who lobbied for government action to staunch the flow of blood from the nation's farms. William joined the American Agriculture Movement that became famous for staging two Tractorcades to Washington, D.C. in the late 1970s while Kate became active in an organization called Women in Farm Economics (WIFE). She explained that joining WIFE "was one of the things that I think that really helped me and made me feel so much better." In the process of working with WIFE, she learned that

we were not the only ones with problems. You know, . . . we would see our friends who seemed to be doing all right. But we hadn't looked in their books. But these guys who were in Washington, and the farm women who were up there with them, were not ashamed to say, "These are my books. Everything is in red ink." [WIFE members] wore red, you know, to signify that our husbands were operating in the red.

WIFE engaged in a range of activities designed to educate lawmakers and the general public about the importance of farmer contributions to the economy and the problems that they faced. Kate represented South Carolina at national WIFE meetings. She said, "[We did] everything promotional that we could think of, everything

educational that we could think of. . . . I went to Washington and testified before the House Ag[riculture] Committee and the Senate Ag[riculture] Committee.” She described her work with WIFE as a series of learning experiences in which she stretched herself and continually took on new challenges. “I really enjoyed being up there even though I felt very much anger. I really enjoyed . . . being able to talk” to lawmakers about the problems facing farmers.

In WIFE meetings and the halls of Congress, Kate Graham gained a greater understanding for the complexities of the political process and the difficulties of changing federal farm policy. She described her growing disillusionment with lawmakers who seemed indifferent to the suffering of farm families:

It made me angry that, the first time I went . . . into the Senate Gallery. . . . The first time I went in there, there were two senators . . . sitting and talking and the other two were standing up talking at each other. You know how that is. “My learned colleague this, my learned colleague that.” You know I thought that I was going to hear them say, “You know this country really does need agriculture” or something. But do you know what they were talking about? Which school had the number one football team in the nation. I nearly came unglued. . . . I was so angry that when they asked me if I would testify I said, “yes.” . . . I started talking, and you know the green light’s on while you talk and then the orange one means you have one minute left and then the red one comes on and you have to stop. Well, I let some of my time go by and they said something to me. And I said, “Well, you know, my mother taught me that it was rude to talk when somebody else was talking.” Talking among themselves, you know, they weren’t listening to what I was saying. And we were losing our way of life, our opportunity to make a living. We were losing land that William’s grandfather, his great-grandfather had farmed. It was fourth-generation land that we were losing and they cared no more about that than I cared about talking about that football.

The Grahams managed to hold on to their land for another ten years or so. William took a job as a mail carrier, and Kate, by then retired from teaching, took a job working for a distribution firm based in Asheville, North Carolina. She commuted back and forth to Lee County on weekends for several years. But in the end, their efforts to pay off their debts with off-farm income were in vain. In the late 1990s after William suffered a slight stroke, the couple was forced to sell their land and

family home to pay off their loans. The couple moved to Asheville where they purchased a condominium and Kate continued to work part-time.

When asked whether she missed life on the farm, Kate replied, “No, I don’t. I don’t miss the garden. We enjoy planting things around here, but I don’t miss all that work. I definitely do not miss seeing William so despondent, you know, over how things are.” She paused and pondered a minute more.

I guess you always look back and miss the past to some extent. And I do miss being able to have all my children with me. I told William the other night, his mama always wanted us all around her and I know why now. [laughs] Around us growing and giving us grandbabies. And you know, that way of life is a wonderful wonderful way to raise children because you don’t have to worry about somebody grabbing them and taking them. You know, you can feel pretty safe on the farm. And that’s the most that we’ve lost. I think we’ve lost a lot.

Kate Graham’s voice provides us with insights into a different set of changes in the countryside, the changes wrought by government policies and competition on world markets. She suggests that the valuable thing about farm life—at least from a woman’s point of view—was not the work itself but the opportunity to build a life with family nearby.

These stories offer us several insights into the impact of agricultural transformation on South Carolina and her women. First, farm women saw themselves as integral parts of the family economy. They described their work in great detail, and they understood that their work—whether it was child-rearing, preserving food, caring for livestock, or earning wages at an off-farm job—was essential to the family’s well-being. Even after farming changed completely after mid-century, they still saw themselves as central to the family economy, but now they contributed through their off-farm jobs and their activism instead of field work, egg sales, and subsistence production. Farm women made enormous and often-overlooked contributions to the family economy and the regional economy.

Second, these women’s experiences broadened as a result of the twentieth century transformation of the rural south. They went to college, had careers, traveled, and even became activists, activities beyond the imagining of their own mothers.

Third, although they regretted some of the changes that swept the Southern countryside, they did not miss farming. They missed supportive rural communities and the opportunity to raise children in an environment they saw as secure, but not one lamented leaving the land. Even Kate Graham, who fought so hard to hold on to

her family's land, maintained that she did not miss the hardships and struggles of farming. But all three regretted the decline of rural communities, noting that something important had been lost as the ties that knit together farm families had frayed.

Fourth, though they may not have missed life on the land, those who left the land while young saw their farm experiences as formative. On the farm, they had learned the values of hard work and persistence that led them to succeed as adults.

Finally, their stories remind us that a full understanding of the impact of historical change is not possible without considering the experiences of all the people affected by that change. Most agricultural history neglects the perspective of the farm women whose labor was so crucial to the farm economy. The reasons for that neglect lie in part in the questions that historians ask about the past. Agricultural historians have asked questions about farming practices and federal policy, about land and market-oriented production. Rarely have they paid attention to the detailed workings of the family economy, to the constant renegotiation of family coping strategies in the face of economic change, or even to the emotional significance of rural transformation. As historian Gerda Lerner reminds us, "women have not been left out of history because of the evil intent of male historians, but because we have considered history only in male-centered terms. We have missed women and their activities, because we have asked questions of history that are inappropriate to women."¹⁵ Farm women were inevitably part of the changes that swept the South Carolina countryside in the twentieth century, and their voices provide us with new insights and a deeper understanding of what the regional economic transformation meant to ordinary people.

NOTES

1. Figures compiled from "State Fact Sheets," Economic Research Service of U.S. Department of Agriculture, available online at <http://www.ers.usda.gov/statefacts.SC.htm> and from U.S. Census of Population, available on-line at http://www.classbrain.com/artstate/publish/article_1262.shtml. Even as late as 1940, 48 percent of the state's population still lived on farms.

2. Figures compiled from U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Agriculture 1930*, vol. 2, pt. 2, pp. 470–75 and "State Fact Sheets," Economic Research Service of U.S. Department of Agriculture, available online at <http://www.ers.usda.gov/statefacts.SC.htm>

3. For more on the shift to capitalist agriculture and the ways in which this shift effected a corresponding shift in the gender division of labor, see Allan Kulikoff, "The Transition to Capitalism in Rural America," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 46 (January 1989): 120–44; Kulikoff, "Households and Markets: Toward a New Synthesis of American Agrarian History," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 50 (April 1993): 342–55; and Nancy Grey Osterud, "Gender and the Transition to Capitalism in Rural America," *Agricultural History* 67 (Spring 1993): 14–29.

4. For more on the work of Southern farm women and their role in the family economy, see Rebecca Sharpless, *Fertile Ground, Narrow Choices: Women On Texas Cotton Farms, 1900–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Melissa Walker, *All We Knew Was to Farm: Rural Women in the Upcountry South, 1919–1941* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work and the Family, From Slavery to the Present* (New York: Vintage, 1985), especially Chapters 3 and 6; Lu Ann Jones, ‘Mama Learned Us to Work’: *Farm Women in the New South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Sally McMillen, “No Easy Time: Rural Southern Women, 1940–1990,” in *The Rural South Since World War II*, R. Douglas Hurt, ed. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998): 59–94. Important studies on southern rural life in the twentieth century include Pete Daniel, *Breaking the Land: The Transformation of Cotton, Tobacco, and Rice Cultures Since 1880* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980) and *Standing at the Crossroads: Southern Life in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986); Jack Temple Kirby, *Rural Worlds Lost: The American South, 1920–1960* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987); and Eldred E. Prince, Jr., with Robert R. Simpson, *Long Green: The Rise and Fall of Tobacco in South Carolina* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000).
5. Unless otherwise indicated, all information on Quinn’s life and all quotes are from Mary Webb Quinn, interviewed by Melissa Walker, Spartanburg, South Carolina, October 18, 2000, transcript in the Kennedy Local History Collection at the Spartanburg County Public Library. An edited version of this interview has been published in Melissa Walker, ed., *Country Women Cope With Hard Times: A Collection of Oral Histories* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004): 149–159.
6. Today this college is known as Spartanburg Methodist College.
7. Gavin Wright, *Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy Since the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986): 228–31, 235; David B. Danbom, *Born in the Country: A History of Rural America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995): 213–15.
8. Wright, *Old South, New South*, 241.
9. Wright, *Old South, New South*, 248; Danbom, *Born in the Country*, 238.
10. Danbom, *Born in the Country*, 234–37; Pete Daniel, *Lost Revolutions: The South in the 1950s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), chapters 2–4.
11. Unless otherwise noted, all information about Margaret Nelson’s life and all quotations come from Margaret Christine Nelson, interviewed by Mary Hebert, 5 July 1995, Summerton, South Carolina, Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University, Behind the Veil: Documenting African American Life in the Jim Crow South, Box UT11, Tray D.
12. For a finely nuanced account of the wide range of relationships between landowners and sharecroppers, see Mark Schultz, *The Rural Face of White Supremacy* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), especially chapter 1, 5, and 6.
13. Unless otherwise indicated, all information on Graham’s life and all quotes are drawn from Kate Graham [pseudonym], interviewed by Melissa Walker, Asheville, North Carolina, April 30, 2002, tape and transcript in author’s possession.
14. Danbom, *Born in the Country*, pp. 254–56, 262–63.
15. Gerda Lerner, “The Necessity of History,” in *Why History Matters* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997): 113–28, quote on p. 119.

A Notice to Contributors Concerning Style

The editorial committee invites submission of manuscripts from authors of papers presented at the annual meeting. On the recommendation of reviewers and editors, manuscripts may be published in *The Proceedings of the South Carolina Historical Association*.

In general, manuscripts should not exceed 4500 words (about eighteen double-spaced pages) including endnotes. As soon as possible after the annual meeting, authors should submit two paper copies and one electronic copy to the editor(s) for review. The electronic copy must be submitted on a PC-compatible diskette written in MS Word for Windows or WordPerfect for Windows. Email attachments are acceptable, but in any event, two paper copies must be submitted. The electronic text should be flush left and double-spaced, with as little special formatting as possible. Do not paginate the electronic version of the paper. All copies should use 12-point type in the Times New Roman font. Do not include a title page, but instead place your name and title at the top of the first page. Please use margins of one inch throughout your paper and space only once between sentences. Indent five spaces without quotation marks all quotations five or more lines in length.

Documentation should be provided in endnotes, not at the foot of each page. At the end of the text of your paper double-space, then type the word "NOTES" centered between the margins. List endnotes in Arabic numerical sequence, each number followed by a period and space, and then the text of the endnote. Endnotes should be flush left and single-spaced. If your word-processing program demands the raised footnote numeral, it will be acceptable. Foreign words and titles of books or journals should be italicized. For the rest, *The Proceedings of the South Carolina Historical Association* adheres in matters of general usage to the fourteenth edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

Minutes of the Seventy-fourth Annual Meeting

February 23–24, 2005

On February 23 and 24, 2004, professional historians and members of the public interested in the history of South Carolina came together at the Archives and History Center in Columbia to celebrate the anniversaries of the South Carolina Historical Association, the South Carolina Department of Archives and History, and the South Carolina Historical Society. The celebration continued in Charleston on February 25 and 26. The commemorative symposium brought distinguished scholars from South Carolina and the nation to share their perceptions of South Carolina history.

On Wednesday, guests heard Charles Joyner speak of “Shared Traditions: The Cultural Theme of Southern Culture,” William Freehling discuss “South Carolina and the Union: Nullification and Secession Compared,” and William Cooper explore the topic “New Time, Old Course: South Carolina Conservatives from 1865 to the 1890s.” Following lunch, James C. Cobb spoke on the topic of “Selling the South or Selling Out the South: Post World War II Economic Development.” Cobb was followed by the SCHA’s own Eldred E. “Wink” Prince, who took the audience on “A Stroll Down Tobacco Road,” and Kari Frederickson, who examined “Life on the Nuclear Frontier: South Carolina in the Cold War Era.”

Thursday’s morning session began with Dan Carter’s examination of “South Carolina and the Transformation of Southern Politics, 1960–1980,” which was followed by SCHA board member Bernie Powers’ comparison of “What We Thought We Knew About Nineteenth Century Black Carolinians And What We Now Know,” and Melissa Walker’s study of South Carolina women, “From Cotton Fields to Classrooms: South Carolina Women Tell the Story of a Changing Countryside.” In the afternoon, the audience heard Vernon Burton discuss “Ben Tillman, the ‘Edgefield Agitator’: Historians, Heroes, and South Carolina Culture,” Jack Irby Hayes expound on “South Carolina and the New Deal,” and Val Littlefield expose “Sins of Neglect: African-American Women and South Carolina.”

Also on Thursday, the SCHA held a brief business meeting. At 1:35 President Tracy Power called the meeting to order. He thanked the officers and other executive committee members for their work during the previous year. Power also solicited items for the newsletter, which has been published sparingly due to the lack of

news of members. There was no secretary's report. Treasurer Rodger Stroup reported that while memberships were slightly down due to the extraordinary nature of the annual meeting, the Association was financially sound. The slate of officers put forth and elected by acclamation for 2005–2006 were President, Robin Copp; Vice President, Wink Prince; Secretary, Ron Cox; and Treasurer, Rodger Stroup. Bernard Powers and Andrew Myers continue to serve terms as members of the board, and Joyce Wood was nominated and elected for a three-year term on the board. Current *Proceedings* editors Robert Figueira and Stephen Lowe were entrusted again with the duty of putting this volume together. There was a brief discussion of the nature of this year's issue, with plans to go back to the traditional format in 2007 (with papers from the 2006 annual meeting). The 2006 meeting will be held on March 4 at the Archives and History Center in Columbia.

On Friday, the festivities moved to Charleston and were in the capable hands of the South Carolina Historical Society. Events included talks by Barbara Bellows, Angela Mack, John McCusker, A.V. Huff, C. James Taylor, and Peter Coclanis, as well as a gala on Friday evening and the annual meeting of the Society on Saturday.

Public events on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday were underwritten in part by the Sonoco Foundation, the South Carolina Humanities Council, the Lucy Hampton Bostick Foundation, and the South Carolina Department of Archives and History.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephen Lowe and Robert Figueira

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Please note:

Because discrepancies occasionally occur in tables of contents of several issues, all article titles in the index above are rendered as they appear on their title pages.

In the 1998 issue the names of each author are listed only in the table of contents, not on the title page of each article.

The pagination noted in the table of contents for the 2005 issue is mostly incorrect, for it reflects the state of an interim draft. This has been corrected in the index above.

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